

Report of the Twelfth Meeting of the CGIAR Oversight Committee

*January 6-7, 1997
London, England*

The CGIAR Oversight Committee (OC) held its twelfth meeting at Overseas Development Administration headquarters in London on January 6-7, 1997. Participating in the meeting were: Andrew Bennett (Chair), Mervet Badawi, William Dar, John Lewis (January 6 only), and Selcuk Özgediz (Secretary). Fernando Chaparro was not able to attend the meeting, but the Committee interacted with him by telephone. Teresa Fogelberg was unable to attend for health reasons. Michel Petit attended on January 6 in his capacity as Chair of the Finance Committee and Director, ESDAR (World Bank).

The agenda consisted of the following items:

- 1. System Issues*
- 2. Global Forum and CGIAR Meetings*
- 3. Center Issues*
- 4. Other Business*
- 5. Internal Matters.*

1. System Issues

Andrew Bennett briefed the OC about his interactions in Washington, D.C. with the CGIAR Chair and Executive Secretary and the Chair of the CGIAR Finance Committee. With this as a backdrop, the OC discussed progress in three system initiatives: System Review of the CGIAR, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the Impact Assessment and Evaluation Group (IAEG).

1.1 Interactions of the OC Chair

Andrew Bennett had discussed the work program of the Oversight Committee and some issues of current interest and concern in the CGIAR with the Chairman of CGIAR. These included the following:

- ICRISAT. The Chairman was keen to have the CGIAR find an early solution to the issues faced by ICRISAT, including the identification and appointment of a new Director General (DG) and other senior staff. The new DG would need to be an experienced manager of change. It was hoped that there would be a strong field of candidates from the South.
- ILRI. The resignation of the DDG was unexpected. It was important to safeguard the quality of the scientific of the work at the Center.

- Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Having completed and discussed the Rabbinge Report, the priority should now be placed on taking concrete action and finding the additional resources needed.
- System Review. Maurice Strong had accepted the task of chairing the Review, but because of his other commitments it would not be possible for him to make a start before MTM 1997. It might therefore be useful for the OC to initiate some work before the MTM to facilitate the start of the Review. One possible area where work and discussion might be helpful was the position of the CGIAR in the global system and how the various constituencies viewed the future roles, functions and mode of working of the CGIAR in the context of its agreed mandate on food security and poverty reduction.

Andrew Bennett had agreed with the CGIAR Chair to place these issues on the agenda of the 12th Meeting of the Oversight Committee.

1.2 System Review of the CGIAR

The OC noted that the start of the System Review would be delayed until about MTM97. It also noted that the task of the Review Panel could be facilitated by having some background papers prepared during the January-May 1997 period.

The future role and position of the CGIAR and the IARCs in the global agricultural research system is the issue of greatest concern to the CGIAR community and is expected to receive a similar priority by the Review Panel. The Panel's study of this issue can be facilitated by having the various constituencies of the CGIAR clarify their perceptions on this issue and by having these perceptions collated in a background paper. It is expected that perceptions of the CGIAR constituency would cover broad strategic questions such as the future role of the CGIAR in the genetic resources area in the light of the changes in public-private sector roles in research, and linkages of the CGIAR with the other components of the global system.

The OC suggests that part of the 1997 MTM be devoted to a preliminary discussion of the future role of the CGIAR in the Global System, with the above-mentioned paper collating views of constituencies serving as a backdrop. To this end, it invites various CGIAR constituencies, individually or in groups, to share their views on this central issue with the Committee. At the request of the OC, ESDAR has kindly agreed to collate these views into a background paper for discussion at the MTM.

ACTIONS SUGGESTED:

- (1) **CGIAR constituencies, individually or in groups, share with the Oversight Committee their views on the future role and positioning of the CGIAR within the global agricultural research system (by March 15, 1997);**
- (2) **ESDAR prepare a background paper collating the views expressed;**
- (3) **part of MTM97 be devoted to discussion of this central issue;**
- (4) **the background paper and the outcome of the MTM discussion be shared with the System Review Panel.**

1.3 Eastern Europe and Central Asia

The OC reviewed the outcome of the discussions at ICW96 on future CGIAR involvement in Eastern/Central Europe and Central Asia/Caucasus. It noted that progress in implementing the Task Force recommendations has been slow. This is, in part, because of the difficulty faced in operationalizing the requirement of the Lucerne Action Program that initiation of programs should be conditional on identification of additional funding.

The OC notes that:

- Central Asia should be approached differently from Eastern Europe. The DAC definition of developing countries now includes also the countries of this region. This post-Lucerne development implies that the CGIAR should implement flexibly the additionality requirement for initiating a systemwide program directed towards Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- There is need for a major transformation of knowledge generation systems in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Transformations in knowledge generation systems are intricately linked with other institutional reforms and with political economy of change in these countries. While programs directed towards agricultural research systems of these countries are needed, funding for these programs are more likely to be available if viewed and presented in the broader context of institutional reform. For this reason, it would be advisable for the CGIAR to make presentations on this issue in forums covering wider issues than agricultural research. The centers should be prepared to develop proposals with both the national systems and potential funding partners.
- CGIAR programs directed towards each of these regions would be clearer when concrete proposals are developed. The Task Force report is a good start in this direction, but more needs to be done to generate fundable proposals that can form the basis of presentations in various forums.

1.4 IAEG

The OC discussed the evolution of IAEG as a new entity within the CGIAR. Michel Petit and Selçuk Özgediz briefed the Committee on the establishment of IAEG, the development of its work program, and possible changes in its composition resulting from the resignation of a member. Andrew Bennett brought to the attention of the OC a concern raised by the Centre Directors Committee about IAEG's linkages with the centers: namely, the extent to which IAEG should rely on the center staff for conduct of system-level impact studies, as compared with contracting such studies to outside experts.

The OC made the following observations about the evolution of IAEG:

- The primary responsibility for the IAEG rests with the Cosponsors, as they nominate its members and finance its operations. The OC is pleased that

UNDP plans to play a more active role in supporting the work of IAEG. The experience to date with IAEG should be reviewed, in the first instance, by the Cosponsors, who should inform the Group of the outcome of their review.

- The IAEG should tap the expertise available at the centers in the conduct of impact studies—to the extent that such expertise is available internally. However, IAEG needs to ensure that the evaluations it commissions are sound and credible (and are perceived as such). This requires careful balancing of external and internal efforts. Where credibility is not perceived as an issue, IAEG should be encouraged to rely on the capacities available at the centers.
- There is an expectation in the CGIAR community that the IAEG should help guide the development of systems by which the CGIAR can track progress in the achievement of development outcomes.
- To strengthen ownership of IAEG by the Group, the mandate and work program of IAEG need to be better understood.

The OC has repeatedly stressed that impact assessment is a vitally important activity for maintaining the relevance and future effectiveness of the CGIAR. The shortening the business meeting of the CGIAR during ICW96 restricted time available to debate the role, achievements, future work program, and working arrangements of IAEG. In the light of the concerns raised above, the OC suggests that the CGIAR discuss IAEG and impact assessment matters at the 1997 MTM, with contributions from the Cosponsors, IAEG, and the Centers.

ACTION SUGGESTED: CGIAR discuss IAEG and impact assessment matters at MTM97, with contributions from the Cosponsors, IAEG and the Centers.

2. Global Forum and CGIAR Meetings

The OC reviewed the developments since the completion of the Global Forum held at ICW96. It also discussed the upcoming CGIAR meeting in Cairo, in the light of issues at hand and lessons learned from ICW96.

2.1 Follow-up to the Global Forum

Several members of the OC had contributed to the evolution of the Global Forum and the conduct of the meetings held in Washington. Fernando Chaparro briefed the Committee of developments since the Washington meetings. He noted that a progress report will be issued shortly to the Global Forum constituencies about recent developments. William Dar reported on progress in the Asia-Pacific region. Other members reported on developments in their respective regions.

Selçuk Özgediz noted that the Secretariat was looking into ways of establishing an electronic global forum, using the internet. This would help facilitate dialogue among the Global Forum participants in between meetings. In addition to facilitating information

sharing, the electronic global forum would also enable the constituencies initiate (and moderate) discussions on substantive issues.

The OC made the following observations:

1. The CGIAR played an important leadership and facilitation role in the formation of a global forum on international agricultural research. It should continue to play a similar role in the follow-up efforts. Members of the CGIAR expect it to continue helping in the formation of synergies among actors. The momentum initiated at ICW96 should not be lost.
2. Notwithstanding further facilitating work by the Global Forum Steering Committee and the CGIAR, the principal focal points for action are the regions. Partnerships should not remain only at the level of rhetoric. This requires continuity of effort at the regional level--which requires strong support mechanisms, in terms of both the funding of regional collaborative initiatives and secretariats to backstop regional initiatives.

The OC is pleased that a donor from the region has agreed to provide financial support to the regional forum in Asia-Pacific. It encourages the donor community to provide similar support to other regional fora.

3. The OC's own mandate is limited to the CGIAR. Therefore, the OC does not serve as an oversight mechanism for the Global Forum. To the extent that strengthening of partnerships is a valued CGIAR goal, the OC will be examining the CGIAR's own performance in this area. The CGIAR System Review would be encouraged to examine these developments and boundary issues.
4. The end user perspective was not a strong input into the Global Forum discussions during ICW96. When NARS have a choice of working with end users directly or through NGOs, they often prefer to work with them directly. While working with NGOs is important, this should not be at the expense of receiving views of end users directly. Follow up work in this area should explore strengthening linkages with end users.
5. The Global Forum has agreed on a steering mechanism. It is also necessary to clarify how the Steering Committee would be supported. For the moment, the CGIAR Secretariat might be best placed to provide support to the Steering Committee. This question should be visited during MTM97, when the representatives from the regions are expected to continue the dialogue initiated at ICW96. The CGIAR MTM agenda should allow for such caucusing during the week of the meeting.
6. Attention should also be focused on how the CGIAR and other Global Forum participants would measure the success of this effort to strengthen partnerships. The Global Forum participants should clarify what constitutes success and how this could be measured and monitored. This is an oversight issue concerning the CGIAR and its participation in the Global Forum.

It would be useful for the Steering Committee to clarify the purposes and boundaries of the Global Forum. This has important implications in terms of which agencies in donor countries would play the key role in providing financial support to collaborative initiatives.

7. Partnerships are not likely to succeed unless financing is available for collaborative work, and there are clear incentives for partnerships. These are questions the CGIAR's Finance Committee might examine further.

ACTIONS SUGGESTED:

- (1) **CGIAR discuss Global Forum follow-up matters at MTM97;**
- (2) **the Global Forum Steering Committee clarify the forum's purposes, boundaries, measures of success, and support mechanisms;**
- (3) **the CGIAR Secretariat strengthen electronic means of dialogue within the Global Forum;**
- (4) **the CGIAR Finance Committee examine mechanisms and incentives for collaborative work.**

2.2 CGIAR Meetings (ICW96 and MTM97)

The OC reviewed the experience with ICW96. It concluded that the shortening of the business meeting had restricted the time available for the Group to discuss substantive issues. Its ironic that when many constituencies now have opportunities to discuss their concerns in their own forums, the CGIAR's own meeting is serving less as a discussion forum.

The OC notes that the expansion of the CGIAR's membership, coupled with increases in the number of committees, have increased the number of delegations represented at CGIAR meetings. It has become difficult to discuss substantive questions in the plenaries.

At ICW96 there were at least three groups reflecting views from developing countries within the CGIAR forum: (1) CGIAR members from developing countries; (2) global and regional forum spokespersons; and (3) regional representatives from developing countries. This is a governance and efficiency issue the CGIAR needs to address. The System Review should examine it as part of its review of CGIAR's governance.

The OC notes that if there are major issues that need discussion, the CGIAR should have opportunities for discussing them. If plenaries are not the most efficient forum for discussing these, other means should be created. Meetings in smaller groups and parallel sessions are two options that should be tried. The Secretariat should set aside time at CGIAR meetings to enable interest groups to meet.

The OC also notes that its own reports have lately been scheduled for the last day of the meeting. An earlier reporting by the OC would enable the Group to be briefed about OC views and recommendations at the beginning of the meeting and the constituencies to express their opinions to the OC during the meeting. Also, an early

report and discussion, plus feedback from constituencies, would allow the OC to consider these at its session held prior to the conclusion of the CGIAR meeting.

ACTIONS SUGGESTED:

- (1) **The Secretariat set aside time at the MTM to enable various constituencies to meet;**
- (2) **the CGIAR should have adequate opportunity to discuss substantive issues at CGIAR meetings--perhaps outside the plenary sessions;**
- (3) **the System Review should examine alternative mechanisms for effective representation of developing country perspectives in the CGIAR.**

3. Center Issues

The OC reviewed recent developments at the centers. The discussion focused mainly on ICRISAT, ISNAR, ILRI, and CIP.

3.1 ICRISAT

The OC reviewed the developments at ICRISAT. Members had been informed of these developments from various sources. The recently completed external review report also provided additional useful background. The OC noted that the review report had not been considered by TAC.

The OC is concerned that ICRISAT is faced with several serious issues simultaneously, including strategic questions about its long-term role, major changes in its management cadre, host country relationships, relationships with staff, and financial difficulties. There are also questions that have been raised about the effectiveness of the Board.

The OC notes that it is important to resolve these issues as soon as possible. The solutions found, and the manner in which issues are resolved, will have broader implications within the System. There are both short-term questions about stabilizing the situation at ICRISAT and long-term questions such as the roles of the center boards and relationships between centers and host countries.

After considerable discussion the OC concluded as follows:

- In the first instance, the Board should be encouraged to show strong leadership and take urgent action to identify and appoint a new DG with proven experience and achievement in the management of change. If however, a suitable candidate could not be found, the Board should be encouraged to make interim arrangements to avoid any chance of a loss in continuity.
- It is important that donors express their concerns about the future of ICRISAT directly to the Board, and by doing so help find solutions to the current difficulties. The OC encourages donors interested in ICRISAT to attend the

Board meeting in February, as this is a crucial opportunity to resolve issues.

- The OC notes that, while the System has made a deliberate choice to have the centers governed and managed in a decentralized fashion, the centers--through their boards--are accountable to the CGIAR. The primary responsibility for addressing the issues faced in an effective and efficient manner resides with the Board. The CGIAR should be ready to assist the Board in bringing normalcy to the center.

The current situation at ICRISAT is one of the most difficult any center could face in the CGIAR. There is need to inform the interested donor and other constituencies frequently and regularly about the steps being taken. Also, it is important that the Board remain informed of the perspectives of the members of the CGIAR on the various options. The Board may wish to expand its own internal capacity by obtaining assistance from the CGIAR in analyzing and addressing the center's concerns.

If the Board considers that assistance from the CGIAR would be helpful, one option to consider at the next meeting would be to request the Chairman of the CGIAR to appoint a small high-level CGIAR group to work with the Board and senior management of ICRISAT to seek satisfactory solutions to the issues faced.

- The OC considers that, as part of the change program at ICRISAT, the Board might need to review the adequacy of the legal agreements of ICRISAT, and the working arrangements between the Center and the host Governments.

ACTIONS SUGGESTED:

- (1) **representatives of interested donors attend the next Board meeting to express their concerns directly to the center;**
- (2) **the Board should speed the DG recruitment process to establish the center's new leadership as quickly as possible;**
- (3) **the Board should consider obtaining assistance from the CGIAR in analyzing and addressing the center's concerns.**

The OC will monitor the developments at ICRISAT and recommend further action, if necessary.

3.2 ISNAR

The OC reviewed recent developments at ISNAR. A new DG had been identified, and a new Board Chair has been appointed at the last board meeting. Also, the third EPMP was recently completed, which raised substantial issues on the future direction and emphasis of the work of the Center.

The OC observed that as the international environment was changing so should the roles of the Centers. The EPMP seems to have given ISNAR a strong signal that the center must look at its positioning within the global system. The messages of the review may have implications for some of the other centers as well.

The EPMR is yet to be considered by TAC and the CGIAR. The OC will continue to keep a watching brief on changes at ISNAR.

3.3 ILRI

The OC discussed recent staff resignations at ILRI and expressed concern over the departure of the DDG. It recognized the major contributions made by the DDG in the merger of ILRAD and ILCA to form ILRI, and expressed appreciation for her work.

The OC considers that the developments at ILRI point to two center management issues that require further examination:

- the role of center boards in the appointment, assessment and dismissal of the management layer next in line to the DG; and,
- adequacy of center mechanisms for settling of grievances by staff.

The OC encourages the center boards to ensure that the centers have adequate policies in these areas. The OC could address the broader issues at one of its future meetings.

Regarding the specific situation at ILRI, the OC makes the following suggestion:

ACTION SUGGESTED: The ILRI Board ensure that the center has sound scientific leadership and that scientific excellence of the center is not adversely affected by staff movements.

3.4 CIP

The OC noted with relief that the Director General and a board member of CIP who had been held hostage in the Japanese Embassy in Peru had been released unharmed.

4. Other Business

4.1 Center Reporting on Projects and Programs

The OC had before it a note from the Chair of the Center Director's Committee expressing concern over the tendency of donors to request separate and different reporting formats for the projects and programs they were supporting. Where several donors were involved with a single project this practice added greatly to the bureaucratic workloads of the Centres. The Center Directors propose that a small working group be commissioned to analyze these concerns so the CGIAR may rationalize and update its reporting procedures.

The OC welcomes this initiative of the Center Directors. However, before any action is taken to modify reporting arrangements, it would be necessary to articulate the problems faced more specifically, and the options for their resolution. Therefore, it would

be useful if the Center Directors could prepare a short issues and options paper for the Oversight and Finance Committees to consider at their meeting scheduled for the MTM in Cairo.

ACTION SUGGESTED: The Center Directors prepare a brief issues and options paper on reporting requirements for the consideration of Oversight and Finance Committees at their meeting scheduled for the MTM in Cairo.

4.2 Board Liability

The OC discussed the possible liability of board members in the event of fraud or financial problems at the Centres. Selçuk Özgediz agreed to seek advice from the CGIAR's legal advisers on the adequacy of the current CGIAR board guidelines on this issue.

ACTION SUGGESTED: The Secretariat to obtain legal advice on the adequacy of the current CGIAR board guidelines on liability of board members.

5. Internal Matters

5.1 Membership and Terms of Reference of OC

The OC reviewed the role and terms of reference of the Committee for the benefit of new members. Selçuk Özgediz briefed the members on the evolution of the Committee. Michel Petit summarized relations between OC and FC.

The Committee also reviewed procedures on appointment and rotation. Because of the implications of OC membership on the composition of the FC, OC appointments should continue to be made at the mid-term meetings of the CGIAR, enabling the donors to caucus and appoint new members to the FC at centers week.

5.2 Mode of Working and Conflicts of Interest

The OC will continue to hold its regular meetings in conjunction with the meetings of the CGIAR. It will hold special meetings when there are significant issues requiring OC's immediate attention. In addition, the Committee will communicate by e-mail in between meetings.

The OC will work primarily as a committee of the whole. When specific issues warrant advance work by a sub-group, it will form working groups as necessary.

The Committee noted that some of its members are also members of center boards. Because the OC discusses, among others, sensitive center matters, conflict of interest situations might arise. It agreed to defer judgement on these matters to individual members.

5.3 Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Oversight Committee is scheduled for May 24, 1997 (Saturday) in Cairo. The OC will also meet during the MTM week for up to a half day (timing subject to the schedule of the MTM).

The OC also agreed to hold a joint meeting with FC to discuss items of mutual interest (such as reporting requirements).

CGIAR Secretariat
February 4, 1996